Office of Research Services
Workforce Plan: FY 2002-2003

May 30, 2001

1. **What skills are currently vital to the accomplishment of the agency's goals and objectives?**

The Office of Research Services (ORS) strategic goal is to effectively and efficiently satisfy the diverse needs of the NIH research and research support efforts as they grow and change. This involves active stewardship of NIH's facilities and environment; vigilant protection of the NIH staff, research animals, and physical assets; enhancement of community work life; and continuing transformation of the ORS into a best practice center for the provision of the research support and infrastructure needed at this complex biomedical research institution.

As the management, conduct, and administration of scientific research change, so do many of the services and human resources required to support these endeavors. This has necessitated that our workforce plan focus on building an adaptable and flexible workforce that can successfully work in a partnership role with the NIH scientific research community.   Skills that are vital to the accomplishment of the ORS's mission include engineering, architecture, construction services acquisition and management, facility and space management, bioengineering, veterinarian science, safety and health, information technology, realty, and security and protection. Given the business model under which ORS operates, additional management competencies such as capital project management, project management, performance based contracting, accounting and financial management, and operations management also need to be further enhanced.

2. **What changes are expected in the work of the agency? How will this affect the agency's human resources? What skills will no longer be required, and what new skills will the agency need in the next five years?**

Presently, two external forces-- electronic data management technology and competition from the private sector are forcing change in the way the ORS approaches its mission. Electronic data management is changing the way transaction based business processes operate. Processes that used to require many hands and many hours can be executed automatically with data systems. A critical component of our strategic plan is to leverage our use of this technology by providing funding for new technology initiatives to: establish an automated call-routing system and application support; invest in applications that will integrate ORS production data with billing information and the NIH Business System; eliminate redundancies within IT operations and take advantage of economies of scale. These and other technological improvements will create a growing requirement for expertise in electronic data system design and management across ORS. At the same time we will reduce the need for clerical staff and other positions such as printing production which currently support simple processes that can be automated.

Another external factor that is expected to change how the work is accomplished and which will have significant implications for our human resources is the emphasis on Acompeting commercial activities@ under the 2001 FAIR Act. The Office of Management and Budget has

issued clarifying instructions for the preparation of the FAIR Act Inventory which will result in more positions being subject to competition and potential outsourcing under A-76 requirements. Combined with this is the Administration's requirement to implement cost comparisons or direct conversions for at least 5% of an agency's competitive inventory. Under present DHHS policies, the significant effect of any outsourcing of ORS activities will be the challenge of reassigning and/or retraining existing employees who are affected by this outsourcing. There is extreme concern that the skills gap between competencies on-hand and competencies needed will be impossible to overcome. The principles of examining the work performed and making business decisions as to performing work in-house, contracting out, or not performing a function are already incorporated into the ORS business methodology. This methodology has at its core an activity based cost approach which allows ORS to more accurately account for its resources and efficiency of operations.

In addition, an internal force, the drive toward more business-like operations, is creating significant change within ORS. This includes the need for business management competencies including marketing, operations management, performance management, and more analytical skills including managerial accounting, cost management, and change management.

3. **What recruitment, training, and retention strategies are being implemented to help ensure that the agency has, and will continue to have a high-quality, diverse workforce?**

To help ensure that the ORS has, and will continue to have, a high quality and diverse workforce, we have formed a Diversity Council. Members of the Council include managers, employees, and the HR and EEO Officers who work in partnership to develop corporate recruitment strategies for mission critical occupations. The Diversity Council recognizes that building a workforce that is adaptable and flexible is increasingly important as workforce turnover accelerates due to retirements and separations. ORS has addressed competition with the private sector for high quality staff through the use of recruitment bonuses, retention allowances, and other pay incentives for our mission critical positions including police officers to support our security and protection program; veterinarians and bioengineers who support our collaborative scientific research endeavors; emergency dispatchers to modernize and staff our Emergency Communications Center; and the IT staff which designs and manages critical technological support systems. As we seek to staff these critical positions, ORS management, human resources, and equal employment opportunity staff work in partnership to identify recruitment strategies to attract a diverse pool of candidates for vacant positions. The ORS Diversity Council has been formed to ensure that the talents of the current workforce are fully utilized.

ORS also has a corporate approach to utilizing a variety of recruitment and retention mechanisms to meet present and future needs and to continue to have a diverse workforce. ORS strategies include vital mechanisms such as the Presidential Management Intern Program and other intern programs; use of Title 42 209 (f) and (g) for science positions; a corporate approach to awards and recognition of employees at all levels; and a corporate approach to senior level recruiting.

4. How is the agency addressing expected skill imbalances due to attrition, including retirements over the next five years?

Historically, the ORS has lost an average of between 90 and 100 employees due to attrition (including voluntary retirements) each year. However, with the ORS's aging workforce, we are at risk of experiencing a significant increase in the number retirements within the next five years when approximately 23 % of our workforce will be eligible to retire. These trends, combined with the emerging competencies needed to meet business needs, will require the ORS to retrain existing staff and to recruit for a strong influx of staff with competencies and skills to meet these new challenges. ORS operates under a business model that allows it to better predict changes in business needs for the future. This allows us to anticipate and target recruitment efforts toward needed competencies.

To identify potential skill imbalances resulting from attrition (including retirements) over the next five years the ORS has examined data on the demographic trends for retirement eligible employees during the next five years and separations over the past three years. Turnover can be beneficial in occupations designated as commercial competitive in helping the ORS achieve the Administration's goals under A-76 requirements. In addition, turnover can be beneficial in situations where the ORS has made corporate decisions to outsource work to achieve greater cost efficiencies and effectiveness such as in printing procurement functions. To address expected imbalances of skills in mission critical occupations, the ORS five year plan focuses on mentoring programs; cross-training; competency based training in activity based costing management; skills training in professional technical and scientific specialties; employee skills assessments and training; administration of the ORS Apprenticeship Program; and exit interviews.

5. What challenges impede the agency's ability to recruit and retain a high-quality, diverse workforce?

Competition with the private sector continues to be problematic in specific occupations, including veterinary science, police officers, engineers, and Information Technology (IT) staff. While pay incentives such as recruitment bonuses and retention allowances have helped to alleviate this problem, we still experience significant competition with the private sector salaries. For example, in recruiting Police Officers, ORS faces significant challenges in competing with local Police jurisdictions which pay starting salaries between 14% and 24% higher than the Federal base pay for Police Officers. As other organizations all experience, ORS has difficulty competing with the private sector for IT professionals.

6. Where has the agency successfully delegated authority or restructured to reduce the number of layers that a programmatic action passes through before it reaches an authoritative decision point?

ORS has initiated organizational restructuring and placement of employees to assist employees in their transition from one type of work to another. These activities are overseen by the ORS Organizational Development Subcommittee, a standing subcommittee of the ORS Executive Committee. For example, in FY00, the ORS successfully accomplished three major restructuring initiatives: 1) the abolishment of our Division of Space and Facilities Management and the merger of these activities with other existing organizations; 2) the abolishment of the Media and Glassware Services Branch to achieve increased cost efficiencies for the scientific community, and 3) completion of outsourcing of the delivery of NIH in-house mail. These restructuring activities resulted in: 1) the elimination of two organizational components, 2) delayering of mission critical services, 3) increasing delegations of authority to front line service providers, 4) bringing services closer to the customer, 5) reducing the number of management positions, and) increasing the span of control. These restructuring efforts were facilitated through retraining; skills assessment; job outplacement assistance; and job coaching for the affected employees. The ORS five year plan includes restructuring the printing procurement work and outsourcing animal care to achieve increased cost efficiencies, fill significant skills gaps in vital program areas, utilize technological advances to improve service delivery; delayer work processes; reduce the number of management positions; and increase the span of control.

7. What barriers (statutory, administrative, physical, or cultural) has the agency identified to achieving workforce restructuring?

Workforce planning is one of the greatest challenges facing ORS organizations in transition, particularly because the human resources consequences can take three to five years to resolve. The lack of management tools such as Buyout and Early Out Retirement authority will impede our ability to achieve the Administrations goals of contracting out to achieve cost efficiencies; delayering processes; implementing service improvements through technological advances, and reducing management positions to increase the span of control and transition staff into front-line service positions. Authorization to offer Buyouts and Early Retirement will help achieve organizational goals while at the same time provide another option for the affected employees. Another issue that presents a challenge for ORS is that in some of the areas identified for outsourcing, we have employed disabled individuals who have been hired through special recruitment mechanisms. The ORS will need assistance in identifying placement opportunities. Given that these employees have performed this same type of work for much of their careers, it will be difficult to retrain these employees within a reasonable time frame. The potential consequences of outsourcing the functions performed by these employees also runs counter to the Administration's initiatives to hire disabled employees into the Federal Government.

ORS Hiring Plans for FYs 2002/2003

	FY 2002	FY 2003	Total
INTRAMURAL			
Senior Investigators [1]	0	0	0
Investigators [1]	2	1	3
Other MD/PhDs, in FTE positions	1	1	2
Other MD/PhDs in non-FTE positions (IRTA, VF)	0	0	0
Other lab/clinical staff => GS-13	6	3	9
Other lab/clinical staff =< GS-12	20	12	32
Admin/support staff => GS-13	12	6	18
Admin/support staff =< GS-12	30	27	57
Infrastructure support => GS-13	13	10	23
Infrastructure support =< GS-12 [2]	58	82	140
Summer and other temps not listed above (include summer IRTAs)	0	0	0
TOTAL INTRAMURAL	142	142	284
EXTRAMURAL			
HSAs/SRAs and other senior level science administrators => GS-13	0	0	0
Other science administration positions =< GS-12	0	0	0
Grants Management and R&D Contract Staff => GS-13 [3]	0	0	0
Grants Management and R&D Contract Staff =< GS-12 [3]	0	0	0
Administrative and support staff => GS-13	0	0	0
Administrative and support staff =< GS-12	0	0	0
Infrastructure support => GS-13	0	0	0
Infrastructure support =< GS-12 [2]	0	0	0
Summer and other temps not listed above	0	0	0
TOTAL EXTRAMURAL	0	0	0
IC TOTAL	142	142	284
[1] Using OIR professional designations			
[2] Include all wage grade positions related to infrastructure in this group			
[3] Includes 1101, 1102, 301 and 303 series where individual is engaged in these activities on a full-time basis.			